THE REDBIRD WORD

Volume 100 Issue 5 **Celebrating 100 years!**

Alton High School, 4200 Humbert Rd., Alton, Ill. 62002, Room B136

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ABOUT THE COVER

IHSA referee raises senior Brayden Drew's arm in victory in a home dual meet against O'Fallon Panthers. The team, as a whole, took the advantage against the Panthers with 43-36. Redbird wrestlers can be found at IHSA sectionals in Edwardsville Feb. 13-14.
Photo courtesy of Brayden Drew

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New Procedure Questions the Benefits of Advisory

By Lily Waltz, Features Editor

Each morning at 8:45, students are expected to be on time and seated in their designated advisory classes. Assistant Principal Nicole Walker said advisory is a time for students to "access academic and social-emotional supports." The period has not seemed to be used to its full potential, as students have been seen in the hallways more frequently.

When students came back from semester break, they were greeted with a new rule for students who either arrive at school after 8:50 a.m. or are found in the hallways after this time without a SmartPass. While the rule was created by the administration team as a whole, Walker took control of creating the outline for this new procedure.

"As an admin team, we have meetings every week and talk about concerns we have and problems we're seeing, and one of those problems was the traffic during the advisory periods with kids roaming the halls and never going to advisory," Walker said. "So, between working Open Gate and observing the flow of students, I then came up with a plan, brought it to my admin team, and we changed things that needed to be fixed."

The new procedure states that any students entering the building after 8:50 a.m. will be escorted to room B205 where they will have to stay for the remainder of advisory. In addition to this, any students found after this time in the hallways without a Smart Pass will automatically be counted as skipping.

"This procedure was implemented to reduce hallway traffic and ensure students are either in their assigned advisory or have a valid pass to receive support from another teacher," Walker said. "We decided to code this as a skip because students wandering the halls typically did not have passes and were not reporting to advisory."

For many students alike, there are uncontrollable circumstances that can be the reason for tardiness, and many face problems with the Open Gate system each morning. While administration has worked to improve this system for students, it can take anywhere from five to 10 minutes just to get through the line.

"We treat this like an airport, like TSA, and the golden rule with flying is you can't just show up to your flight within five minutes before your flight is about to take off," Walker said."That's what we've been trying to tell students, you have to consider the amount of time it takes to go through Open Gate."

With the need for implementation of this rule, it raises the question of how beneficial the 20-minute advisory period is for students. Senior Kenzie Stark said advisory has no benefit towards herself or those around her.

"I think it's just strange that we have a 20-minute class period where there's barely time to get anything done," Stark said. "Then we get assignments and surveys that aren't for a grade. It feels pointless."

While the new advisory rule implemented by administration has caused a variety of different feelings within both students and staff, the main focus is to ensure safety within the school. With concerns about tardiness, Open Gate delays and the overall purpose of advisory still present, the effectiveness of the policy may ultimately depend on whether the time is restructured to better serve students' academic, social and emotional needs.

Students arriving after 8:45 a.m. are moved to the "tardy" line, in which they will be escorted to room B205.

Photo by Lily Waltz, Features Editor

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Warning Signs: Confronting Teen Dating Violence Awareness

By Brooklyn Moore, Reporter & Ja'Zariah Day, Reporter
Edited by Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

A person she had thought once felt like home now felt so different. Too afraid to speak to the people she used to. The person he was so used to being with now seemed so timid because of the actions he had committed. The room was silent and tension stiffened.

Domestic violence is something that hasn't always been talked about, and there are people who deal with it on a daily basis. According to Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, one in three teens in the U.S. are a victim of teen dating violence.

McKenna Riley, social worker, has been in the district for three years. She has encountered many situations filled with violence amongst teens.

"[One of] the most common reasons teenagers are hesitant to report any violence from a relationship is that they don't want to get that person in trouble, and retaliation from that person," Riley said.

Riley said that red flags for relationships are being isolated, ending friendships with people, avoiding trusted people, any drastic changes in appetite or sleep and how they take care of themselves.

"There are programs for perpetrators of violence that can help them to see their own behavior," Riley said.

There is also counseling for people who've been through abusive relationships through the school guidance counselors and the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

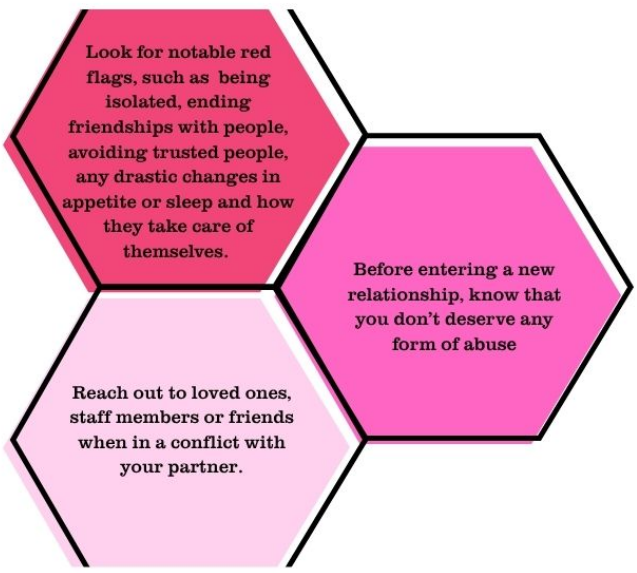
"It's a very serious subject, and I feel like people don't understand it until they are out of the relationship," sophomore Sophia Santrock said.
According to the Center of Violence Prevention, allowing toxicity to grow can lead into danger because approximately 13% of sixth through ninth graders in Midwest schools reported being stalked. Victims of teen dating violence report higher rates of truancy, antisocial behavior and problems with friends.

Victims can feel scared to speak up when they know their abuser because they trusted this person.

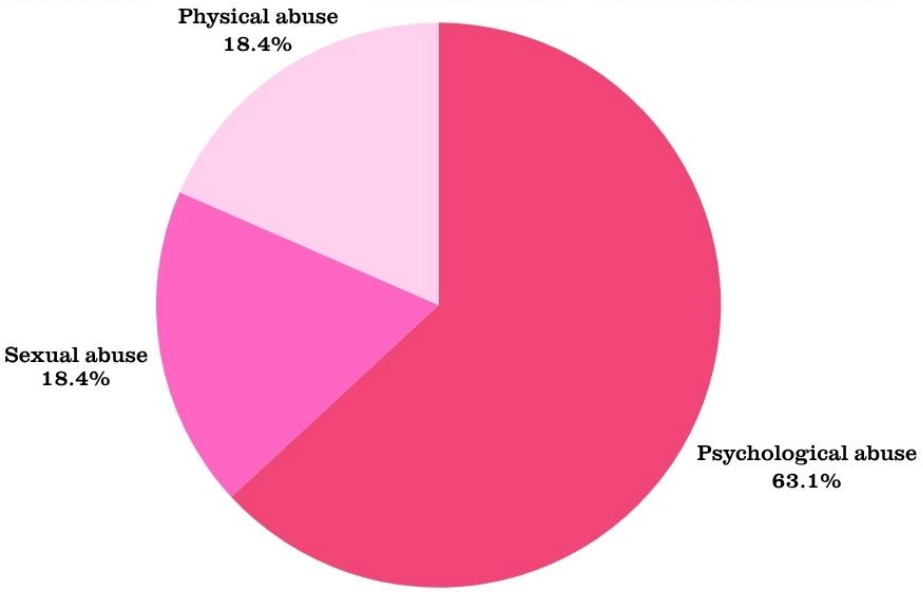
"Students need to feel comfortable talking to an adult about what's going on in their lives, so you want to establish a relationship with them," staff member Gary Woods said.

February is Teen Domestic Violence Awareness month, and if anyone is in these situations, it's important to speak up. To get help in these situations, talk to a trusted adult who can provide resources.

WAYS TO AVOID VIOLENCE IN TEEN DATING


Look for notable red flags, such as being isolated, ending friendships with people, avoiding trusted people, any drastic changes in appetite or sleep and how they take care of themselves.
Before entering a new relationship, know that you don't deserve any form of abuse
Reach out to loved ones, staff members or friends when in a conflict with your partner.

FORMS OF VIOLENCE SEEN



Information provided by the American Psychological Association, 2025.
Created by Garrett Stafford, Broadcast Editor & Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

FROM ABANDONED TO AFFORDABLE

How a Local Nonprofit Plans to Rehabilitate Alton's Ursuline Sisters Convent

By Stella Cowan, Copy Editor

Many Altonians know of the vacant Ursuline Sisters Convent on Danforth St., its looming structure still holding remnants from the nuns who relocated in late 2014. For 11 years the building has gathered dirt, wildlife and adventurous teenage explorers as plans for its rehabilitation fall through.

However, the newly organized Cultural, Agronomic and Technological Community (or CATCo) plans to bring the building back to life.

CATCo, originally a small group of friends who gathered for game nights, is now a certified nonprofit aiming to restore the convent for affordable housing and learning spaces.

Jamie Donelson, the Director of Education and Inclusivity for the group, said that the space will be multi-purpose. He hopes that eventually the convent will hold housing, event spaces, a library, kitchen, community garden and classrooms where people can learn skills such as budgeting, resume writing, nutrition, basic plumbing and electrical.

One of the main goals of the proposed self-sufficient community, according to organizer Donnie Reynolds, is to lift low-income residents to the point where they can purchase or rent their own property. By offering rent credit for tasks such as gardening or cooking, tenants can put more income towards savings.

"I see future residents earning credits if you will," Reynolds said. "They can pitch in and help with the running of the facility. Then their rent will be even cheaper."

CATCo also plans to have free to-go meals available from their kitchen and gardens.

"They may not live there or volunteer there, but people can come and get something," Donelson said. "A lunch or a dinner, or even use the resource library."

Reynolds and Donelson are aiming for as low a barrier of entry as possible.

"We're trying to be as cheap as possible for everybody," Donelson said.

The cost of living at the community remains undecided.

"They [community members] can have meals here if they want. They can volunteer some of their time, so they can save a lot of money that way," Reynolds said. "Live and save."

Concerns over the project taking place in a residential area have been voiced with questions about safety being especially prominent. Donelson said misinformation has been a large challenge as far as integrating the reformed convent into neighborhood life.

"We're very open to [people] coming to us with questions," Donelson said. "Come to us with suggestions. If you see something and you have a concern, tell us."

The deal to purchase the convent was closed on Jan. 6 after nearly six months of negotiation with the previous owner. CATCo hopes to rezone the building from a single family home and make progress with construction within the next three months, jumpstarting the project as soon as possible.

Questions, comments or concerns can be directed to the organization's website, madcatco.org.

An old sign hangs above a staircase leading to the convent kitchens.
Photo by Stella Cowan, Copy Editor

An inside view of a building adjacent to the Convent is shown fallen into disrepair.
Photo by Stella Cowan, Copy Editor

A side view of the Convent shows future apartments for residents.
Photo by Stella Cowan, Copy Editor

Students listen to the lecture, "Factors that Impact Human Brain Development," given by neurosurgeon Paul Young.
Photo by Ellen Anderson

GROWING MINDS

Saturday Scholars Opens Doors to STEM Careers for Students

By Juliette Meza, Photo & Art Editor

On Feb. 7, students loaded themselves onto a bus and traveled to a lecture hall for the beginning of Saturday Scholars. Every Saturday in February, students will learn about different topics in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

Saturday Scholars is available for all students to sign up for. Alton High School, among other Madison County school districts, goes to Edwardsville High School for each lecture. Biology and zoology teacher, Angela Laaker, has been encouraging students to attend Saturday Scholars for over five years.

"We listen to professionals, mostly in STEM fields such as physicist and forensics, but it can be a lot of different topics," Laaker said. "The speakers are chosen by the people that run Saturday Scholars that also help promote it for each school."

In the first lecture, "Factors that Impact Human Brain Development," neurosurgeon Paul Young from Saint Louis University talked to students about understanding the human brain. He went into detail about a path in neuroscience, giving the students a broader knowledge of what the career would entail. There will be four more lectures throughout the month where other careers will be discussed.

"Students get exposed to a variety of topics so that they can make choices towards a career," Laaker said. "It could encourage them to consider various careers or even go to certain schools."

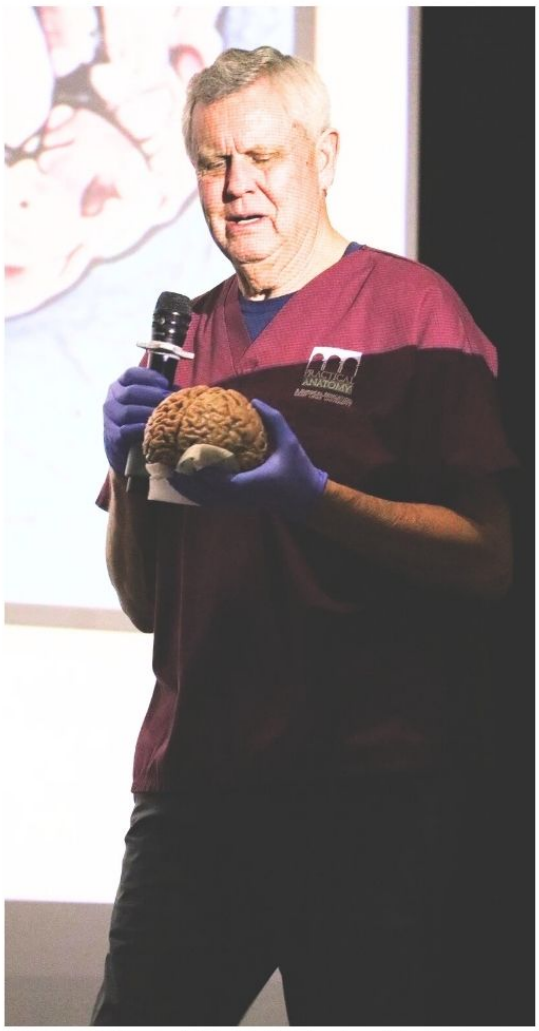
In past years, a field trip has been included in Saturday Scholars, one of them being to a cadaver lab. During this lecture, students get to learn about human anatomy through a viewing of a donated human body. Medical professionals walk them through how they died and any medical conditions that contributed to their death. This year, the field trip involves the science side to crime, forensic science.

"This year, we are going to the forensic science department at Saint Louis University," Laaker said. "I love listening to a speaker on a topic that I have never even considered."

Senior Katherine Krafka participated in Saturday Scholars from freshman to junior year. Krafka said she enjoys learning about different paths and the little details.

"It was really cool to learn all the new things and listen to people who I would have never met," Krafka said. "It was also a fun way to learn about other careers."

While it is too late to sign up for this year, Saturday Scholars will be held next February during the 2026-27 school year. For additional information, email Angela Laaker at alaaker@altonschools.org.



Dr. Paul Young tells students about the brain during a lecture about neuroscience.
Photo by Ellen Anderson

Students from Alton's Music Program Excel to All-State

By Raye Holmes, Social Media Manager

Following the Illinois Music Education Association [ILMEA] district six festival that took place on Nov. 22, 2025, participants moved on to the next level, ILMEA All-State.

This year, All-State took place in Peoria, Ill. from Jan. 28 through the 31.

As a whole, ILMEA is an audition-based music festival for band, chorus and orchestra. There are two different auditions processes one to get into district and another for chair placement at All-State.

"Near the end of September, you can audition for ILMEA district," senior orchestra student Makayla Burns said. "If you make it into district, you then can be selected to ILMEA All-State. If you are selected to All-State, you under-go another audition which then determines your seating for the festival in Peoria."

The audition process is different for all of the students involved, whether memorizing different scales or the way they prepare themselves outside of school.

"I prepared a scale sheet, a technical/faster etude and a lyrical/slower etude and submitted each recording in one audition video," junior band student Quinn Halliday said. "The judges used that audition to place me at the District VI festival and select me for All-State. Then, I had to resubmit an audition with the same material for a chair placement among the All-State and All-State Honor Bands."

In Peoria, students went through three days of rehearsing with highly regarded music directors and a concert on the fourth day. The program helps open students up to different opportunities.

"All-State gives me the opportunity to visit Peoria again and to meet and learn from different musicians and conductors," junior orchestra student Erick Humphrey said. "It feels a little bit like a sneak peek of going to college and being thrown in with a bunch of new people."

Alton had eight students participate in All-State this year: Quinn Halliday, Wesley LeBrun, Erick Humphrey, Austin Koller, Aiden McGiffen, Preston Watson, Elias Meydam and Evelyn Terpening. This year marks many of the students first time at All-State.

"This is a really big milestone for me," Halliday said. " ... I'm really, really excited to take part in the festival and experience it all for the first time."

Students line up in front of the bus before leaving on the journey to All-State.

Photo by Dawn Humphrey

BLACK

Alton High School Students Reflect on Pride, Progress and Possibility During Black History Month

By Heaven Everage, Sports Editor

Black History Month holds different meanings for Black students and staff at Alton High School, serving as a time for reflection, pride and recognition of both past struggles and present success.

Observed each February, Black History Month highlights the contributions and resilience of African Americans throughout history. For many students at Alton High School, the month also creates space to recognize their own growth, leadership and sense of identity.

Senior Daija Merrifield said her understanding of Black History Month has evolved since her freshman year as she has learned more about Black history and her own roots.

"I feel a lot more connected to my roots the older I get, especially with the new things I've learned," Merrifield said. "I feel more pride in my Black heritage and celebrate more during the month."

For Merrifield, Black History Month represents a time of unity and recognition for Black excellence.

"It's a specific time for the celebration and recognition of successful people in Black history," Merrifield said. "It's also a time for me as an African American to be around people that look like me and celebrate our success.

Merrifield said she hopes younger Black students feel empowered to believe in themselves.

"Always move with confidence and advocate for yourself," Merrifield said. "Never let anybody underestimate you."

While Merrifield focuses on pride and self-confidence, Black History Month pushes Senior Student Council President and cheer co-captain, Naeem West, to reflect on legacy and responsibility.

"For me, Black History Month is a time to really reflect, learn and appreciate the ones who have come before me," West said.

As a Black, male cheerleader, West said his role allows him to challenge stereotypes and change perceptions.

"It allows me to prove that Black students can be successful and that Alton is not what people assume it is," West said. "I've been in situations where I'm the minority and have to prove myself more than others."

Junior Kourtnee Evans scans the court for her next move during a game against the Highland Bulldogs. Photo courtesy of @thprods_ on instagram

Senior Naeem West walks the track alongside family during football season senior night. *Photo courtesy of Naeem West*

Senior Daija Merrifield gets sworn in as the National Council of Negro Women Youth (NCNW) Wellness Ambassador at a monthly meeting. Photo courtesy of Staci Westfall-Herron

HISTORY MONTH

West said Black History Month encourages him to lead authentically and stay determined.

"It encourages me to keep trying and continue to fight for what my ancestors fought for," West said. "I want to keep making them proud."

Athletics also play a role in how Black History Month is experienced at Alton High School. For junior girls' basketball player Kourtnee Evans, the month highlights the strength and talent of Black women in sports.

"Black History Month is important to me because it shows how talented my culture is," Evans said. "A lot of Black, female athletes get counted out, so being seen, heard and noticed means a lot."

Evans said Black History Month reminds her of the influence Black, women athletes have on others.

"Seeing their confidence gives me confidence," Evans said. "It makes me feel like I can do it too."

Professional athletes like WNBA player A'ja Wilson inspire Evans to play fearlessly.

"She goes out there and doesn't let anything stop her," Evans said.

For junior Michael Henry, Black History Month represents opportunity and possibility.

As a student barber and business owner, he sees himself as part of the future being built.

"It shows that a young Black boy in high school can own a business and be successful," Henry said. "I want my business to inspire people to follow their passions."

For Henry, learning about Black history has shaped how he views his future, even when challenges exist.

"I know some people won't like what I do or how successful I am just because of my skin color," Henry said.

Together, these students make it clear that Black History Month at Alton High School is not just remembered. It is lived every day by students shaping the future.

Before and after photos highlight junior entrepreneur Michael Henry's most recent work. Photo courtesy of @sllicedby.mikemike on Instagram

PRESEASON GRIND

Boys' Tennis Heating up for Spring Season

By Keagan Korte, Reporter

Coming off a 7-11 record in their 2024-25 season, the boys' varsity tennis team is shaping up to turn some heads this season. Returning from a productive season where they won multiple titles such as the JD Sinnock Springfield Invitational in April of 2025 and they beat their cross town rivals Marquette Catholic High School in the Alton City Championship. They hope to carry on their winning ways heading into the 2026 season.

The team has young, talented players still in the program. Sophomore Carter Hanebutt came off a successful freshmen season, winning the most matches out of the whole team.

"I'm expected to play well, and obviously at the number one level and win matches," Hanebutt said.

The boys' and girls' tennis teams are both coached by Jesse Macias, who has now been coaching for over two decades.

"I have been coaching at Alton High for 25 years, and I love it," Macias said. "We have student athletes who like to have fun, like to win and they really support each other."

Alton plays in the Southwestern Conference (SWC) with other competitive schools like Edwardsville, O'Fallon, Belleville East, Belleville West and East St. Louis. Other schools like Triad, Mascoutah and Granite City will be joining the conference in the fall of 2026.

"Every match is going to be tough," Macias said. "The SWC is deep and every team has a few superstars. We are looking forward to the challenge."

The boys have been preparing in the offseason to start on a journey to achieve the goals they've set for themselves this year.

"We have a group of players who have been working hard in the offseason," Macias said. Nik Tuetken, Erick Humphrey, and Carter Hanebutt were All-Conference last year, and they are playing well right now. We have a good group of other players returning too."

The Southwestern Conference is one of the more competetive conferences to play in.

"Have fun and commit to the team, and if we do, then we will be able to compete in conference, have a winning record and send players to state," Macias said.

Sophomore Carter Hanebutt prepares for the upcoming tennis season during practice.
Photo courtesy of Keagan Korte

Senior Niklas Tuetken spends his time scrimmaging in preparation for the previous 2024-25 season.
Photo by Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

BOYS' BASKETBALL SHINES

Team Makes Strides to Have a Strong and Competitive Season

By Kyridas Orr, Sports Editor

With the arrival of the cold air, winter sports are beginning to hit their stride. The boys' basketball team is focused on setting a tone throughout the season.

The team opened their season with 16 wins and eight losses playing through a tough schedule, as well as one of the most competitive conferences in the Midwest. They currently sit second in the conference.

"The overall tone of this season has been different than the past couple of years," senior point guard Semaj Stampley said.

With 11 seniors that graduated in the 2024-25 season, there were many roles to be filled by the underclassmen. This seaon, only six players will be graduating.

"This year we are overlooked and underestimated due to the less experience of the guys stepping into the senior roles from last year," Stampley said. "So, every game is to prove those people wrong."

That motivation has translated onto the court. Matching up against a conference rival, East St. Louis Senior High School on Jan. 6, the boys put up serious points against the Flyers.

With the final score being 87-84, resulting in a loss, this did not discourage the boys but rather encouraged them to improve.

"After a loss, the next practice we just put our heads down and worked to get better," junior power forward Britton Clayton said.

A turning point this season for the team was the Centralia tournament where they lost two games in a row, and when they came back, Clayton said they had "one of the hardest, but most productive practices yet."

After playing East St. Louis Senior High School, they faced the O'Fallon Township High School Panthers at Alton High School on Jan. 9 and had a rocky start, as the Panthers led 32-26. The boys came together in the second half and secured a 70-64 victory.

Alton has begun to establish themselves and their identity. Growing the team chemistry and producing on the court, the Redbirds stay competitive in close conference matchups. As the schedule moves deeper into winter, the Redbirds remain focused on consistency and continued growth.

With conference play intensifying and postseason goals in sight, the team hopes to turn its early-season challenges into a foundation for success. If the Redbirds continue to build chemistry and maintain their competitive edge, they could position themselves as a dangerous opponent come playoffs.

The boys' varsity basketball team heads to the bench on a timeout call against Sumner on Jan.1st.
Photo by Grace Massey

Head coach, Dylan Dudley, draws up a play during a time out against the Edwardsville Tigers on Dec. 12th.
Photo by Grace Massey

FROM FIRST HOOP TO 1000

Senior Kaylea Lacey Scores Her 1000th Career Point

By Kyridas Orr, Sports Editor

Senior Kaylea Lacey holds up balloons in celebration of the 1000 points she scored. *Photo courtesy of Kaylea Lacey*

Lacey celebrates her achievement with her family members. *Photo courtesy of Kaylea Lacey*

Lacey, and her family, wear celebratory shirts to commend her 1000 points achievement. *Photo courtesy of Kaylea Lacey*

As of January, senior Kaylea Lacey is leading the Lady Redbirds in scoring by averaging 15.8 points per game and having recently surpassed the 1,000-point career milestone.

This milestone isn't reached by most in their high school career. To reach 1,000 points in four years, players must average 250 points per season. Two hundred fifty, divided by the number of games they play, would be an average of 8.3 points per game.

At a home game against East St. Louis Senior High School, a crowd of friends, family and supporters came out to the Alton High School gym to help celebrate Lacey in her recent accomplishment of joining the 1000-point club.

The basketball team came together and made posters congratulating her as they celebrated at halftime.

"It means a lot because it's not an accomplishment that many people reach, especially in our school, so I am glad to be one of them," Lacey said. "After my junior season, I had 805 points so I knew getting over 200 more would be too difficult to get."

Lacey committed to Wichita State University in Kansas in 2025. She is a four-year varsity letterman for the Alton women's basketball team and a three-year varsity track athlete. Early morning workouts, late practices and offseason training became routine, all contributing to her success.

"Just working on being confident in what I do and being consistent doing it," Lacey said.

Basketball is more than a sport for Lacey.

"Basketball has shown me how strong I truly am as a person, despite the physical look of strength," Lacey said. "It showed me how to take criticism and to apply it to real-life situations. It has shown me that you have to earn everything you want in life."

Lacey has played under the guidance of many AAU [Amateur Athletic Union] coaches and school coaches.

"They have just been encouraging and telling me that I can be an efficient scorer and to keep being aggressive, leaning into my strengths," Lacey said.

Throughout Lacey's career at Alton High School, she has been a leader and a role model in every sport she has played. Lacey's impact extends beyond the stat sheet. She is a role model for the next class of girls' basketball players.

"Lacey sets a tone for the team," sophomore shooting guard Claire Delahanty said.

Her place in the 1,000-point club stands as a milestone, but her influence on Alton High School athletics will be felt long after her final game.

ON THE MAT

Brayden Drew paces in between wrestling matches.
Photo courtesy of Brayden Drew

Senior Wrestler Celebrates 100 Wins

By Victoria Strowmatt, Copy Editor

Celebrating 100 wins may seem like an unimaginable goal, but for student athletes like Brayden Drew, this goal was attainable. Drew participates in football and wrestling. He started playing sports when he was five-years-old.

"I think I love playing football with the team around me," Drew said. "But I definitely think that wrestling is great, just overall effort. It's all me, and I can win by myself or lose by myself."

Drew is the varsity captain for both wrestling and football. Since his sophomore year, he has been captain of varsity wrestling, and this year, he is captain of varsity football. Also, this year, he won first place at the 64th Red Schmitt Holiday Wrestling Tournament at Granite City High School on Dec. 30, awarding him his 100th win.

"I felt incredible about the 100 wins," Drew said. "It was something I knew was coming up, and it is just a great milestone as a competitor in the sport."

Gaining 100 wins is not just a number for Drew, but a reminder of years of training and competing. Participating in two varsity sports, while captain for both, requires both leadership skills and determination. Even after experiencing injuries in both shoulders, Drew pushes towards his goals.

"I feel like I've improved a ton, especially in the strength aspect and technique," Drew said. "I think that my mindset is also one of the biggest things. Just not settling for good enough. I'm always trying to be great."

Drew said he is not focused on record wins, but personal improvement and leadership. Even on the wrestling mat and on the football field, he remains confident and resilient. For Drew, this does not mean an end to a journey, but a drive to higher goals.

"I don't necessarily have a coach I am closer with," Drew said. "I love them all, and they have all helped me reach my goals. I look up to a lot of guys, but my dad is a big one, as I've heard about his accomplishments all my life and being able to accomplish things like that makes me feel great."

Drew credits both his coaches for their support in wrestling and football. Drew said he is not certain what he will pursue after high school, but still plans to participate in sports in the future due to his love for it. His journey will create a path for future student athletes.

Brayden Drew smiles with Head Wrestling Coach, Eric Roberson, and assistant coach, Taylor McGiffen, celebrating his 100th career win.
Photo courtesy of Alton Athletics Instagram

Drew accepts a victory post match.
Photo courtesy of Brayden Drew

CUPID STRIKES

OPINION:10 Things I Hate about You: How to Love School

By Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

Redbirds, the time has come. After three consecutive years of the Redbird Word Valentine's playbook, I must pass the torch. Last year, I was able to give the student body the best advice on getting a Valentine on short notice, and the year before, you learned how to find the perfect gift. Now that my time here is coming to an end, I think it's appropriate to make sure everyone has an equal opportunity of making the most out of their time in high school... even if that means announcing what I "hate" about it. We complain about it all, and whine about how we're so ready to leave, so to stop stalling, "10 Things I Hate about You."

ONE: I hate that you kind of smell. Sometimes people are just uncontrollably smelly, or entirely controllably. The feeling of laughing in the halls with your friends, splitting ways and immediately walking into the stinkiest room you've ever been into in your entire life. Even worse if your teacher had something like tuna egg salad for lunch.

TWO: I hate that you give me open opportunities. Personally, I've joined so many clubs and made so many friendships and personal connections through them. The opportunities that our school specifically provides have led me directly to reason three.

THREE: I hate that I found my passions. With the amount of classes within our school and the amount of curriculum that they each cover, you're bound to discover that every blonde girl wants to be a nurse. It came out of nowhere!

FOUR: I hate when the rules are changed. Yondr pouches? Advisory? View Boards? SmartPass? You make me feel like someone's grandma, as the least technologically-advanced person you'll know. We're lucky I finally figured out how to use a desktop computer.

FIVE: I hate that you sometimes fail me. If I could sell my left leg to never take a math class again, I wouldn't think twice. Sometimes you have to take summer school, sometimes you have to grind out all of that missing homework the week before finals, and sometimes you just have to decide to contact your counselor. That's alright. I call it character development.

SIX: I hate that the halls are broken. Just like a road, ladies and gentlemen. Stay on the right side, otherwise everyone gets scared, confused and lost while simultaneously dodging strange puddles of mystery liquid and making sure to acknowledge the friends you have passing by.

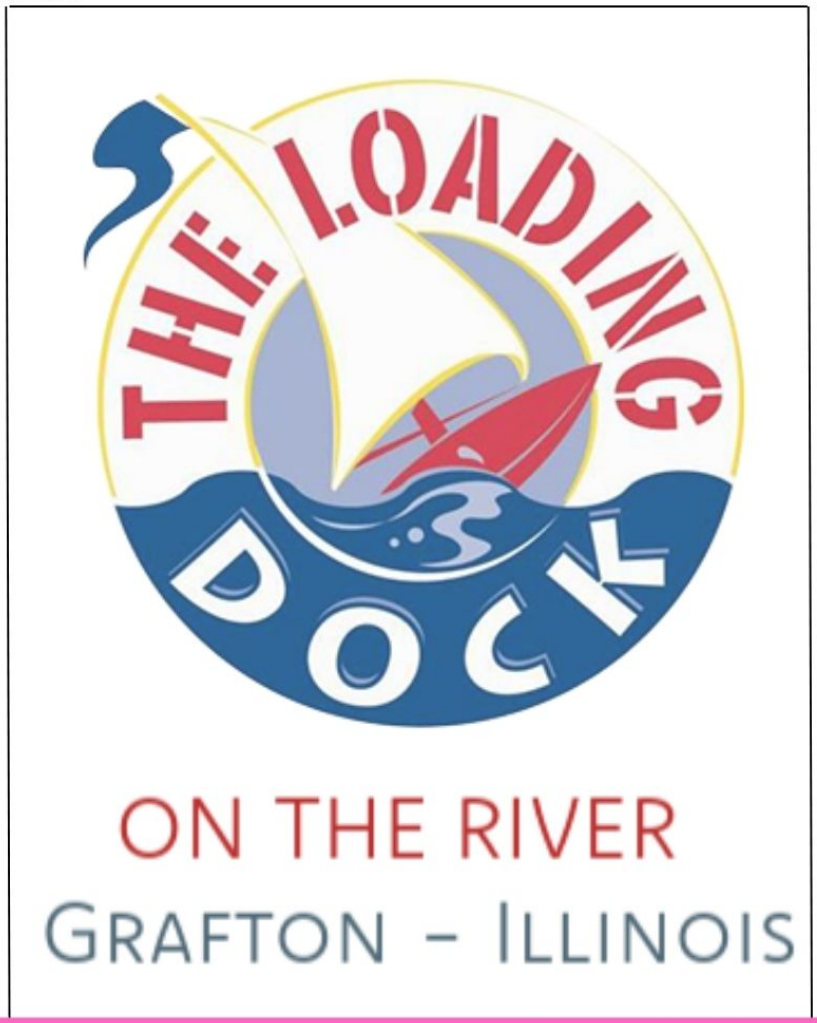
SEVEN: I hate publicly displayed affection. We're all so happy for you, truly, but I will confidently tell you that I don't remember signing up to watch your 14-year-old steamy makeout session and accidentally make eye contact with you. How are you making it to class on time?

EIGHT: I hate when I fall down the stairs sometimes. Are my shoes too big? Did someone trip me? Did the stairs move? I'm not understanding how we all seem to do it so often. "Every year, at least once a semester, I just take a tumble - typically up - and everyone just points and laughs," former social media manager, Lydia Copeland.

NINE: I hate that you take up so much personal time. It's like your own personal stalker, except nothing about it is nonchalant and mysterious. The argument of making school days shorter or having three-day weekends will never end. We will always be stuck in this cycle.

TEN: I hate that it's time to go. Even after all of this, the stress, complaints, numerous, "I can't wait to be out of here" comments, it's finally becoming real. We have to make decisions, do real things and actually lock in.

High school is entirely the opposite of perfect. Yet, we will all find an aspect of it that we miss whether it's our teachers, friends, classes or even just having the routine. So Redbirds, don't forget to grow beyond this place because despite everything I hate, I'm glad I came.



Social Pressures Push Student Journalists to Self-Censor

By Leigha Cole, Editor-In-Chief

In a time marked by the news being increasingly influential and weaponized, student journalists are more important to the history of our country now more than ever. A productive setting is crucial to young students learning to give their community a voice and question authoritative powers. Now, trends suggest that student press environments are under subtle pressures of the social climate. In turn they suffer from self-censorship and underproduction of "controversial topics" such as LGBTQ+, elections, discrimination and gun violence in fear of repercussions, despite Student Press Freedom Rights.

Self-censorship amongst student journalists is no longer a hypothetical concern, but a reality. A survey amongst high school journalists, hosted by the Joseph L. Brechner Freedom of Information Project, insists that this extension of our First Amendment is being threatened. Almost half [48%] of these journalists hold back from writing on topics that could potentially be considered controversial, due to a fear of reaction from authorities. With that, the survey also revealed that authority had been putting pressure on topics as a whole and even prohibiting them, stating, "38% of them had been told that particular sensitive topics were categorically off limits for discussion in student media outlets." Authoritative figures are creating a restriction on student journalists' freedom of speech, and have been consistently, despite our rights.

Speech has become weaponized in current politics, deeming controversial topics as much as dangerous, in turn discouraging bringing certain topics up and nearly eliminating them from discussion. Last year, esteemed student press advocate organizations - Quill & Scroll and Student Press Law Center - recommended student-led news outlets to revisit internal policies, "particularly for those whose immigration status may make them targets for their lawful speech." The purpose of journalism has moved from providing unprecedented and unbiased coverage into subjecting others to potential harm while pressuring the media into covering from a specific point of view.

Future journalists are continuously turned away from covering issues their peers are most involved and interested in. Real current issues are being pushed under the rug daily, putting the future of true journalism at risk. Topics like racial discrimination, immigration and deportation, LGBTQ+ hardships and even gun violence relate to the general audience of America now more than ever.

A Pew Research study found that 57% of American journalists are deeply concerned about the future of journalism, misinformation and their press freedom rights. If student journalists are discouraged from the hardest parts of the job and the most sensitive stories, the future will be unprepared and heavily biased.

Student journalism isn't just about keeping classes and clubs available, it's about being sure that the future of student press freedom is intact. Writing the uncomfortable pieces, and getting outside of comfort zones, is the only way true history is written. If fear is instilled in this process, history will become askew and false news will become even more prominent than the truth.

The future of journalism matters now, as well as student press rights, so student journalists should not be taught to cover a story in fear. This year's Scholastic Journalism Week theme is "Press Under Pressure," highlighting the mass amount of misinformation and silenced expression in student reporters, the week of Feb. 23-27. Throughout the week and remainder of the year, the Journalism Education Association invites journalists to promote hashtags #SJW2026 and #PressUnderPressure.

Check out our online content!

EDITORIAL

Once Upon A Recess

MATCH THE CLASS OF 2026 WITH THEIR ELEMENTARY EX!

Created by Lily Waltz, Features Editor

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PARKER CANNON

DIANA STROWMATT

ANSWERS: NAEEM WEST & MAKAYLA BURNS; LYDIA COPELAND & NOHLAN COFFEY; PARKER CANNON & HAILEY SMITH; OREN ASHER & DIANA STROWMATT; HANK MCCLAINE & GRACE JONES